

# THE PLAIN VIEW



JULY 1945

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*What the plain view perceives is neither obvious nor obscure*

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## COMMENTARY

**B**UILDING JERUSALEM. We have seen the worst that can be built, for worse is not imaginable than the industrial slums, villainous suburbs, and stupid public buildings which are not far to seek anywhere in Britain. We have seen the disastrous mistakes which can be made on the road to better things, which we tried to follow after the last war. To say that something has been learned from this vile inheritance and from the deficient statesmanship of more recent years is an understatement. There is a steadier and completer vision of a new English heaven and a new English earth than has ever been achieved before. And it is not utopian. The ideas which go to the making of it have come not only from the writings of sociologists and architects but also from the reports of departmental committees, the field-work of pioneers (in the garden cities, for example), and the detailed town-planning schemes submitted to the public. These ideas build up into a coherent body of doctrine, feasible, widely and officially accepted, adaptable to local variety, and comprehensive enough to cover all national needs. Mr. F. J. Osborn, a pioneer and a leading authority, sums up this doctrine under its main heads for general guidance in an article which we print in this issue.

What obstructions are in the way of this possible achievement? By what dangers is it imperilled? The doctrine has been laid before the local authorities, urban and rural, with a wealth of detailed advice and technical information. They have been encouraged to carry out their part, to prepare their long-term plans. Will they do it? Will they be able to do it? It depends, in the first place, on a series of national policies, on how they are framed and enforced, policies concerning the location of industry, the reduction of building costs (including interest on loans), financial provisions, the acquisition and control of the use of land, the provision of public services in rural areas, the manufacture of temporary houses. The best that local authorities may be anxious to do is exposed to frustration from these policies if they are only half-measures or are ill-conceived. In the second place, it depends on the ability of the local authorities to fit a short-term programme meeting the demand for immediate accommodation into a properly devised long-term plan. In the third place, it depends on whether the local authorities are eager and resolute to achieve the maximum of what is open to them, or merely ready to conform to the minimum of what is required of them.

Obviously, therefore, there is serious danger that this great social adventure will miscarry, unless there are active and instructed citizens concerning themselves with it in every area. The local government area is the field of action and the local authority is the fulcrum for the lever of public opinion. It has been found useful in some places to start off with a Brains Trust composed of, say, members of the Housing Committee, an architect, the surveyor, a housing manager. This excites interest and spreads information and may be a useful preliminary to a local campaign.

What is being projected is the building not only of a new earth but also of a new heaven. Architecture since early history has enjoyed a religious function, which it has fulfilled in the monumental manner. In our new mass society it has still a religious function, if the monumental manner can be forgotten, viz., to raise the quality of daily life: in the words of a recent book, reviewed in this issue, it has to realize "the idea of planning for pleasant living, sociability, and full enjoyment of living in the sense of savouring the performance of the humdrum routine of daily existence". This comes home to men's business and bosoms. It will be ominous, indeed, if not many can be roused to cross their doorsteps in this cause.

**PARTY POLITICS.** Where freedom of association and freedom of expression are practised, there are three constant factors in politics: the alignment of conservatives, the alignment of radicals, the ubiquitous activities of opportunists. Of course, to say this is to make a mere abstraction from the political scene, which is normally too complicated and too confused for any such simplicities to be visible. However, the re-shaping of political parties after emergence from the melting-pot of national defeat does tend to exhibit this model, for with healthy national life suffocated by enemy occupation, the cancerous growth of opportunism spreads without check, to the limit of liability. It is possible to take note of the extent, and, with the recovery of national independence, to cut it out. A systematic and exhaustive purge tracing the cancerous tissues to the last cell is not practical politics, and is not desirable: an exemplary purge and the complete domination of healthy elements is the sign of recovery.

The struggle for healthy political life in normal times is the struggle to discover, discredit, and purge out the opportunists and to promote the full and free interplay of true conservatives and true progressives. Leaving aside the problem of party careerists and party bureaucrats, the main problem is to distinguish reactionaries and opportunists from true conservatives. Only the possibility of doing this can provide the conditions of mutual respect and national solidarity and make political warfare different in kind from civil war. The great merit of the Tory Reformers is that they do set out to save their party from the hands of reactionaries and opportunists and to rehabilitate true Conservatism. No radical can be expected to regard them with enthusiasm, but it is political folly to lump them with their own enemies inside their party. Whether or not they can themselves leaven the lump, they and their policies provide a convenient test for other conservatives.

What, then, is the difference between a conservative and a reactionary or an opportunist? The reactionary is easily described as one who resists with tooth and nail any and every attempt to touch his interests, no matter for what purpose. The opportunist exploits every opportunity

to further his interests and improve his advantages, no matter at whose cost. The true conservative is not so easily described. He represents and defends a class interest (it is silly to pretend otherwise), but in relation to another class interest whose claims he respects. He is not so absorbed in self-interest and blind to social injustices that he is without a sense of the need for reforms; therefore, he does not meet progressive proposals with sheer obstruction or tactical adroitness. Without hypocrisy, he can make national idealism his main theme, with overtones of historical imagination and undertones of personal temperament. With his roots in established values, with no less generosity than the progressive, and perhaps rather more flexibility, he has a worthy part to play in the present phase of social development. He is a political necessity. He is to be respected as well as opposed. It is political lunacy to regard him with the angry contempt, the unsleeping suspicion, the cool readiness to strike which must be kept for the opportunist and the reactionary.

**POLITICAL IDEALISM.** Mr. Churchill, on the morrow of victory in Europe, claimed that the forbearance of Britain in respecting the neutrality of Eire, against the counsels of prudence and expediency and in a situation of extreme danger, was unparalleled in history. Mr. de Valera, in his rejoinder, preferred to dwell on the recognition that Mr. Churchill's judgment had trembled in the balance and would have come down on the side of occupation if the margin of safety had been even narrower than it was: he would not have chosen to perish with his cause for the sake of the moral credit to which he was laying claim. Thus idealism unparalleled is only removed in degree (not in kind) from outrage unspeakable—if one concedes that Germany in 1914 struck through Belgium, not in wanton aggression (as in her attack on Poland in 1939), but to save herself in a threatened war on two fronts. The cynic will say that such is the case and the difference between idealism and realism in politics is a distinction not worth making, except for the pleasure of exposing the claims of the idealist as the mask of the hypocrite. Really, the distinction exemplified in these two historical cases is of far-reaching importance, for it is the distinction between some consideration for the interests of others in international relations and none; and some consideration, limited but calculable and dependable consideration, takes international relations into a higher orbit of possibility, a level on which relatively stable constructions can be built, founded on mutual confidence.

Certainly national self-interest is the only possible basis of international relations; and certainly a scrupulous, reliable regard for the interests of other nations when they do not coincide with those of one's own breaks the logic of power politics. It is a confusion rather than a clean transition; but the willingness to take risk-bearing decisions out of respect for the rights or claims of other nations is not by any means worthless because the willingness will only bear a proportion of risk. It

is a willingness which tends to establish itself by example as a norm, and by being generally shared it creates the comity of nations, a new interest which it becomes necessary to safeguard and protect. Germany's reading of the universal doctrine of power politics has been more logical than our own, and she has been taught in a hard school. But her open-eyed and sincere realism condemned her, and would have condemned the world, to inhabit a human jungle. It requires a different sort of virtue, the courage of inconsistency, to make possible the transition to a more lasting and more promising order of human relations.

**T**H E P A S T I S N O T T H E F U T U R E. There are three fears which haunt us because of what has happened in the world of our time: fear of war, of economic disaster, of social regimentation. These fears are as natural and wholesome as the burnt child's dread of fire. But possessive as they are because of deep-biting experience of their reality, and aggravated as they will be by disquieting news in the months and years to come and by the arguments of writers and speakers, there is a real danger that wholesome fear will become disabling neurosis. We should look into them now and see that as fears of the future they are largely irrational. The shadow which they throw on our path is the shadow of past events, not that of the shape of things to come.

War, for example, even if we fail to get the institutional machinery which would promise to secure once for all indivisible peace, is not a likely event. Friction, injustice, diplomatic deadlock, and depressing news of this kind there undoubtedly will be; and these are danger signs and bad in themselves, but they are not as bad as war and they are not likely to mean war. When we speak of the peace-loving nations and of civilization, we mean something real—something which we can recognize (without forgiving or forgetting) as a genuine and worthy side of the policy of appeasement. The case of Germany is exceptional (and explicable), and so is the case of Japan. The true force of the conscience and intelligence of mankind is active in spite of our doubts: the truth has been obscured rather than revealed by the extraordinary and tragic developments in Germany. There was more in the 19th century doctrine of progress than we are now willing to see in it. And war, anyhow, does not break out overnight. Its definite shape is visible to those who have eyes to see long years before its outbreak is imminent; and that is the time for alarm and for action. When we see the war-maker and the policy of appeasement, and nothing can be done to arrest the fatal slide, it will be folly to hope. But where is there any prospect of this now?

Economic disasters are more likely and only less devastating. Nevertheless, the situation is not at all the same now as in the Twenty Years' Crisis. Governments in future will be bound to accept over-all responsibility for economic policy, and to stand or fall by results. There is new and widespread knowledge of economic causes and of preventive tech-

niques and forms of control. There is a general readiness for the necessary policies, and experience in applying them. It may be that disastrous policies will be followed, but we shall be fools indeed if we are overtaken by what happened last time, which is what we have learned to fear and shall be silly to fear too much.

Our dread of regimentation comes from the recognition that a planned economy is inescapably necessary. We don't escape by pretending that it is not necessary. On the other hand, consciously or unconsciously, to assimilate a planned economy to the totalitarian state is either wicked or stupid. It has no necessary connexion with the totalitarian state. On the contrary, nothing else can save us from totalitarianism. The planned economy is a measure of hope, of salvation, and we should dread its alternatives. If we accept the free social discipline of planning we can put away the fear of regimentation.

We should not fly to the extreme of quenching these fears with mere argumentation. However, it is most urgent that we should see things as they are, and break up the widely prevalent fixation on the past. Then we can face the future with flexible minds and a good heart.

## WINSTANLEY, THE DIGGER

ON Sunday, the 1st of April, 1649, a band of a dozen landless men, with their wives and children, camped on St. George's Hill, near Walton-on-Thames, in Surrey, and proceeded to dig and manure the common. Their leader, William Everard, had served in Cromwell's New Model Army until his radicalism caused him to be cashiered. But for him and his comrades this was to be a peaceful, albeit a revolutionary, act. The "true levellers," as they called themselves, had lived through the most stirring years in English history. They had lost their faith alike in the men of property who dominated the Long Parliament and in the "grandees" who commanded its army. But with unflagging courage they meant with their spades to open yet another campaign for freedom. They would by direct action make good their natural right to use the earth and enjoy its fruits: they would undo the Norman Conquest and challenge the institution of private property in land on which, since the coming of feudalism, English society had been built. They were communists, who believed in eating and working together. They demanded for the proletarians the right to till the vast area of waste land which covered, as they reckoned, one-third of England. By this tactic they believed they could make an end of the slavish practice of working for wages. This social revolution could be wrought without bloodshed, for the Diggers were pacifists, who sang as they worked together, that "freedom is not won neither by sword nor gun." With a firm belief that God was behind them and that a new era was about to dawn, they meant

to carry out a communist revolution by peaceful persuasion. They were the pioneers. Presently, they predicted, five thousand of their proletarian comrades would join them in digging the waste lands.

It very nearly happened, for these were years of intense economic misery. The Civil War had closed the ports and interrupted seaborne trade. A series of bad harvests had raised the price of bread. The Poor Law, in this period of strife and confusion, had all but ceased to function. For the maimed veterans, the widows and orphans of its own army the Long Parliament made no provision, and still less did it concern itself with the disbanded ranks of the King's army. Beneath this recent distress festered a sore of much longer standing. Very gradually, over a period of rather more than a century-and-a-half, the process of enclosure had been changing the face of the English countryside. It meant, especially in the Midlands, that numbers of men who had once cultivated their strips of land in the great open fields as copyhold tenants were now landless and often homeless; while even the landless labourer was losing his right to pasture his beasts and cut his firewood on the common. Some drifted to the crowded and insanitary towns; others became casual labourers on the lands of the new rich; the less fortunate turned vagrants. The peasantry had never acquiesced in this capitalist revolution. History records the one determined effort to resist it with arms, Ket's rebellion; but few years passed, even under the early Stuarts, without some local rising, in which the villagers "levelled" the fences and hedges of the enclosed lands. The "true Levellers," or Diggers, fought the last bloodless battle in this long guerilla struggle, which differed from the obscure skirmishes that preceded it in this—that these rebels were inspired by a simple but clear-cut communist theory and had worked out a tactic by which they believed they could end the usurpations of property and establish a classless society. For the first time they made articulate the instinctive belief of every peasantry that God gave the earth to his children (to use the Diggers' phraseology) as their "common treasury".

The story of this spirited enterprise is soon told. The Diggers were men of courage, whose faith gave them a stubborn perseverance against impossible odds. First at St. George's Hill, and afterwards at Cobham, they challenged the rights of two Lords of the Manor, not merely by squatting on the commons and cultivating them, but also by defiantly felling timber. They succeeded in causing considerable alarm to the Council of State, and troops of horse were twice sent to repress them. Twice their doings brought them into court. Fairfax, with his usual courtesy, listened to what they had to say, but the Lords of the Manor were less tolerant and twice their hired men, helped by the troopers, broke up the Diggers' settlement, destroyed the cottages they had built and turned the cattle into the growing corn. Their numbers grew, none the less, from twelve men to fifty: they managed to raise corn on eleven acres of the waste land, not to mention other crops, and they kept up their defiance of the landlords, the army and the law for rather more

than a year. Their missionaries, meanwhile, were touring England in a cart and preaching their gospel as they went. They had some success. Their example was followed at Cox Hall, in Kent, and at Wellingborough. There, as a broadsheet published for the Diggers in 1650 tells us, there were, in one parish alone, 1,169 persons dependent on alms. They had petitioned the Justices in vain to be set to work, but nothing was done for them. The itinerant Diggers organised them and they set to work "to dig up, manure and sow corn upon the common and waste ground called Bareshank, belonging to the inhabitants of Wellingborough." They evidently met with a good deal of sympathy in the town and some farmers gave them seed, but they, too, were suppressed; which is not surprising since their broadsheet, which their leaders had the courage to sign, boldly proclaimed the right of all to the use and enjoyment of the land.

Fortunately for posterity, there was among the Diggers a man of rare talent and originality, Gerrard Winstanley, who has left behind him in his voluminous writings a record of the faith and beliefs with which he inspired this movement. Though Everard may have been its leader in the early days of its adventure, it is probable that Winstanley inspired it from the start and certain that he soon took over the leadership. During its hectic year of activity he poured forth pamphlets in which he addressed by turns the army, the City of London and the Parliament. In these, in simple but vigorous English, in the language of the Bible and of daily life, he gave a straightforward narrative of what the Diggers had done and suffered and set forth the principles on which they acted. Of his life very little is known. He was born at Wigan in 1609 and doubtless had a grammar school education and no more. He then went up to London, where he was in business in some branch of the cloth or linen trade. Like many others, he was ruined in the Civil War and withdrew to the country, somewhere in the Thames Valley, where friends gave him a lodging: in return, he took charge of their cattle. Here he had leisure to think, and during 1648 he published no less than four pamphlets in which, without touching on politics, he set forth his daring theological opinions, which evolved rapidly, through a pantheistic mysticism to a position that can only be described, if we may use modern terms, though agnostic and secularist. He bravely signed his name to them, though the least unorthodox of them exposed him to the grim penalties of the Long Parliament's Blasphemy Act. They went into several editions, but he escaped the fate that overtook some less audacious heretics even under Cromwell's relatively tolerant rule.

Suddenly, in this year, his interest turned to politics and he wrote the most characteristic of his books, *The New Law of Righteousness*, which is in reality a Communist Manifesto written in the dialect of its day. Throughout the next year, 1649-50, he was the life and pen of the Diggers' adventure. When that failed, after writing *Fire in the Bush*, a

defence of his ideas addressed to the Churches, he published in 1652 the most mature of his books, *The Law of Freedom in a Platform*. It was dedicated, in an eloquent and plain-spoken address, to Cromwell, whom it summoned to lay the foundations of a Communist Commonwealth. The sketch of a class-less society that follows is a deeply interesting blend of the radical democracy professed by the main body of the Levellers with the communism of More's *Utopia* and a secularism that was Winstanley's own. Like More, he advocated an economy without money, organised round public storehouses. To these each should carry the products of his work and from them each should satisfy his needs. Though the book lacks the literary and imaginative grace of More's work, it is in the history of Socialist thought the more significant of the two, since it sprang from a proletarian movement and proposed a strategical plan by which communism could actually be realised. This was the last of Winstanley's writings, and all that we know of the rest of his life is that in 1660 he was living at Cobham and had evidently become more prosperous, since he was able to file a suit in Chancery to clear up his financial affairs. The traditional belief that he joined the Quakers is mistaken, though he had much in common with them. It is probable that he never married. Of his death we have no record.

How did Winstanley come by his ideas? There is nothing to suggest that he read widely. He quotes no book except the Bible and never mentions *Utopia*, though he must have read it carefully. Once he exclaims "England is a prison," which may be an echo of Hamlet. Once, and only once, he quotes a Latin line. He must have absorbed the controversial literature of the Leveller Movement, but he never refers to it. He tells us that in his early years he listened attentively to sermons and was "dipped" as a Baptist. There we have the first important clue. Communist thought in the sixteenth century had two chief sources, the persecuted Left Wing of the Bohemian Hussites and the widespread Anabaptist Movement, which originated in Switzerland, spread to the Rhineland and Holland, influenced the leaders of the German Peasants' War and made its militant communist revolution at Münster. In England its doctrines were preached underground by a persecuted little sect known as the Family of Love. This tradition, of which the main stream was pacifist, filtered through most of the more radical sects of the Commonwealth period, kept alive through their pulpits by word of mouth. There is one outstanding passage in Winstanley which echoes almost verbatim a revolutionary sermon by Münzer, the German peasants' leader—though it is unlikely that Winstanley had ever heard of him.

The other decisive formative influence was the Leveller Party. Starting as a mass movement among the tradesmen and craftsmen of London, it dominated for a time the junior officers and the ranks of Cromwell's army and was gaining ground rapidly in the Home Counties before he suppressed it. It stood for the formal guarantee of funda-

mental liberties by a charter, the Agreement of the People; for a republic; annual parliaments; manhood suffrage; the direct election of all magistrates and officers, including ministers of religion; for absolute toleration; universal education; free care for the aged and the sick; and for humanity in the criminal law and simplicity in the legal code. Its opponents accused it of communism—incorrectly, for its main tendency, and the outlook of its beloved leader, Colonel John Lilburne, were certainly individualistic. But it had its Communist wing, which may have included its most attractive writer, William Walwyn. In its origins an urban party, it turned its attention to the land problem only as it spread beyond London. It demanded the restoration “to the poor” of all common lands, and finally concentrated on the abolition of “base tenures.” This would have done for England what the Great Revolution did for France—made it a land of small peasant owners.

It is clear that Winstanley came in contact with the Levellers of the Chilterns and the Thames Valley in 1648. This was a strong and radical group, which saw social problems with the eyes of countrymen. For them the chief enemy was the Lord of the Manor and the chief evil the enclosures, together with tithes, rack rents, and the feudal oppressions of fines, heriots and servitudes, which, with a naïve English nationalism, they traced to the Norman Conquest. Starting from these grievances of day-to-day life in the villages, they were beginning to challenge the whole institution of private property in land. This organised group, which had its centre at Aylesbury, published in 1648 and 1649 two remarkable unsigned pamphlets, *Light Shining in Buckinghamshire* and *More Light Shining in Buckinghamshire*. Winstanley cannot have been the author, for their crude style is not his, but it is probable that he had a share in drafting them. They repeat all the commonplaces of Leveller doctrine, but their substance is an attack on the idle rich, who live by other men's labour. Almost in Proudhon's words, they argue that property is theft.

For man to inclose all lands and creatures from his kind is utterly unnatural, wicked and treacherous; for if man shall eat bread by his sweat, then he must needs have ground to sow corn; therefore to inclose all grounds from him is to starve him, for if no corn, no bread, and if no ground, no corn; then this is theft in the highest degree. Mark this, you great cormudgings, you hang a man for stealing for his wants—when you yourselves have stole from your fellow brethren all lands, creatures, etc.

It was doubtless the same group of “the well-affected in the county of Buckinghamshire” which met at Aylesbury in May, 1649, while the “Grandees” of the army were crushing its mutineers at Burford, and adopted a declaration in which they promised their support to “all well-affected persons that join in community in God's way” and to the “poor” who manure and dig the Commons and “fell the woods growing thereon to help them to a stock.” The Diggers had their backers.

Winstanley, then, was no lonely theorist, but if we could have asked him where he got his Communism he would have mentioned neither the Anabaptist tradition nor the Leveller Movement. It came to him by direct revelation from God. Three times, as he tells us, in trance and out of trance, he heard a Voice which uttered these three commands:

Work together; eat bread together; declare this all abroad.  
Israel shall neither take hire, nor give hire.

Whosoever labours the earth for any person or persons, that are lifted up to rule over others, and doth not look upon themselves as equal to others in the creation: the hand of the Lord shall be upon that labourer: I the Lord have spoken it and I will do it.

In obedience to this Voice he went to work with the first pioneers on St. George's Hill. For the benefit of others, who had not yet learned in silence and patience to listen to the Voice of the Spirit within, Winstanley would argue his case, if need be from Scripture, but preferably from history and experience. Fundamentally, his argument was ethical. He assumes throughout, as men have done from the earliest days of the cult of ancestors, that mankind is naturally, was originally, or was by God's ordinances and promises a family of equals.

This was the commonplace of every peasant movement from the days of John Ball downwards. But Winstanley saw much more than this and he contrives to analyse the society round him with a shrewdness unusual in mystics. The only difficulty in understanding him comes from the simplicity of his language. He has no technical terms and it is only when we translate his Biblical idiom into modern phraseology that we realise how much he understood. More clearly than any of the instinctive communists who preceded him, he saw the source of all exploitation and of most of the misery round him in the private appropriation of the means of life, which in the green England of his day, meant the land. When men take to "buying and selling the earth," as he puts it, "saying *This is mine* . . . [they] restrain other fellow-creatures from seeking nourishment from their mother earth. . . . So that he that had no land was to work for those, for small wages, that called the land theirs; and thereby some are lifted up into the chair of tyranny and others trod under the foot-stool of misery, as if the earth were made for a few; not for all men." Again and again he declares that labour is the source of all wealth and that no man ever grew rich save by appropriating the fruits of others' work.\* He perceived that this institution of "particular propriety" was inevitably the source of all oppressions and all wars. "All the strivings," he writes, "that is in mankind is for the

\* "No man can be rich, but he must be rich, either by his own labours, or by the labours of other men helping him. If a man have no help from his neighbour, he shall never gather an estate of hundreds and thousands a year. If other men help him to work, then are those riches his neighbours' as well as his; for they be the fruits of other men's labours as well as his own."

earth;" and again of those who own land he says "that they or their fathers got it by the sword." Property can be maintained only by the sword, or by the law which originally sanctioned the feudal claims of "the Norman bastard's" officers. He saw, too, and said plainly, that economic inequality degrades those who must submit to it and infects them with a consciousness of their predestined inferiority. The enslaved worker, as he puts it, "looks upon himself as imperfect, and so is dejected in his spirits."

Winstanley's revolutionary strategy was prescribed by "the Voice of the Spirit within him"—or, as we should say, by his sub-conscious self, clarifying, it may be, the confused discussions he had held with the Levellers of the Chilterns. In one passage he says, as Rousseau did, that no man should retain more land than he can till with his own hands. But his ideal was not peasant ownership. He aimed at "community," which meant for him both team work and eating at a common table. He saw two ways of reaching this. Landless men were to join together to dig the waste lands. But even more emphatically he insisted on making an end of all hired service. In plain words, he summoned the workers to withdraw their labour from employment on the land. This was, as he saw it, more than a general strike: the strikers would find permanent work in cultivating the commons for themselves. This may sound to our ears more simple-minded than it was. Did he really forget that the Council of State had Fairfax and his dragoons behind it? But he believed, as well he might, that revolution was on the march, and he knew that many a troop of these same dragoons was on the verge of mutiny. But to grasp Winstanley's approach to Communism we must try to understand his whole *Weltanschauung*.

The difficulty in grasping Winstanley's view of the universe and human society is that his thought was in flux and underwent a rapid development. His voluminous writing was all done, much of it rapidly, in four years: he had little sense for form or order in his compositions and often seems to be thinking aloud. His was an intuitive mind rather than a trained intellect, and his ideas reach us most clearly in single phrases or sentences which often have a poetical colour. In his early religious pamphlets he had not yet reached his own distinctive position, which may have come to him in his talks with William Everard. In the first of these he argues for "universalism," at that date a most dangerous heresy: he will not believe that any soul can be eternally damned: there will be a final delivery, by God's mercy, even of the wicked from Hell. In his later writings he abandoned any belief in Hell. It was in the daring pamphlet, *Truth Lifting Up Its Head Above Scandals* (1648) that he first outlined his theological opinions by way of defending Everard, who had been thrown into gaol at Kingston for blasphemy. In this, as in all his subsequent works, he throws over the idea of a personal God, reduces to very narrow limits the significance of

an historical Christ, and offers us in their stead the pantheistic conception of an ordered Cosmos. These, needless to say, were not his words—he rarely used an abstract term—but they render his meaning fairly in contemporary phraseology.

Let us try, first of all, to reach his positive beliefs. He first startles us by telling us that he proposes “to use the word Reason instead of the word God” in his writings. He objects that when men tell him that “God is the chief Maker and Governor, and that the chief Maker and Governor is God,” he is “lost in this wheel that turns round.” This seems to mean that he cannot distinguish God from the Universe. For him Reason is “that living power of light that is in all things.” The Spirit Reason “lies in the bottom of love, of justice, of wisdom”; “it doth govern and preserve all things . . . for Reason guides them in order and leads them to their end, which is not to preserve a part, but the whole creation.” Again, he tells us that Reason “hath a regard to the whole creation and knits every creature into a oneness.”

This, it may be, is poetry rather than metaphysics. So, too, are many of his happier sayings. Thus he tells us that “the whole creation is the clothing of God.” But what he is trying to say is quite clear. In flashes of insight, before Newton wrote his *Principia*, he had grasped the idea of the order and unity of the universe. God for him was this Order and “the incomprehensible spirit Reason,” of which he might have said what Wordsworth said of Duty: “Thou dost preserve the stars from wrong.”

How much did he mean by this identification of God with the Cosmos? The test must be sought in the negative side of his thinking. There he did not flinch. “What other knowledge have you of God,” he asks, “but what you have within the circle of the Creation?” In one passage he even speaks of “The Law of Nature (or God),” as Spinoza used to write “*Deus sive Natura*.” To these must be added the many passages that amount to a denial of a personal God. “Neither are you to look for God in a place of glory beyond the sun, but within yourself and in every man . . . He that looks for a God outside himself and worships a God at a distance worships he knows not what.”

This did not prevent him from using the word God fairly often, for he did not stick to his resolution to use only the word Reason. Even more often he uses the name Christ, and declares more than once that Christ is “the true and faithful Leveller.” Elsewhere he speaks of “Christ, or the spreading power of light.” He gives this name, with no thought of its historical connotations, to the spirit of love, order and reason that dwells in the heart of all men—and even, as he expressly insists, of the beasts. Again and again he repeats that men cannot be “saved by believing that a man lived and died long ago at Jerusalem”—and he insists that Christ is “not a man at a distance, but the wisdom of the Father.” Always he rejects from his theology any “outward Christ”—a word we may fairly translate by “historical.” He defines Him as “a meek

spirit drawn up to live in the light of Reason," which is his way of sublimating the story of the Resurrection. The passage implies quite clearly that any man may become such a "meek spirit." He goes on to deny the physical Resurrection and Ascension pretty bluntly: the Apostles cannot have seen Christ "arise and ascend" to God in heaven, for God is in no "particular place" but "in every place and in every creature." Again and again, in one phrase or another, in all his books he declares that "Heaven is not a local place of glory at a distance": a good man has "Heaven within himself." Neither are we bound to believe that there is "a local place of hell": "as yet none ever came from the dead to tell men on earth, and till then men ought to speak no more than they know." In his last book his agnosticism about the after-life is even more outspoken: he is not sure of man's personal survival after death. "After the man is dead" he may be scattered "into his essences of fire, water, earth and air of which he is compounded." He recommends to us the example of "wise-hearted Thomas," who believed nothing but what he saw reason for. Elsewhere he sweeps away the whole body of Hebrew and Christian mythology as "the deceit of imagination and fleshly wisdom and learning; it teaches you to look altogether upon a history without you of things that were done 6,000 years ago and of things that were done 1,649 years ago." He is never weary of tilting at the Bibliostry of the Puritan divines, and likes to remind them that they have no better ground than "tradition" for trusting the "copies of the Scriptures in their universities" and that there are "many translations and interpretations, which differ much one from another." He could, none the less, quote these Scriptures copiously when they suited his purpose.

It is proper to stress this negative side of Winstanley's thought, since in the Puritan England of the Seventeenth Century it was all but unique. None the less, in his own individual way, his was a deeply religious mind. One belief he retained with intense conviction, which he shared with the whole of the Puritan Left—the Second Coming of Christ. It is true that he sublimates it almost beyond recognition. It is no sudden miracle that he means. He was as far as possible from expecting, as General Harrison and the Fifth Monarchy sect did, that the Saints will conquer the earth, with the Lord of Hosts ordering their ranks. What he did believe was that "Christ, or the spreading power of light," will penetrate men's minds so that they will cease to covet and oppress and "community" will be realised without recourse to the sword. When that happens "the whole creation will laugh in righteousness" and even the waste commons will blossom. It will make an end of government as we have known it in the past: "the State," as Marx put it, "will wither away." "You soldiers may see the end of your trade." With his sharp consciousness of class, he loves to quote the Biblical prophecies which assure this triumph to "the despised ones of the earth" and bid the rich men "weep and howl." He predicts that this revolution will be accomplished "ere many years wheel

about." It is a law of human nature that every revolution must attain this certainty before it risks its all. Men got it in that century from the Book of Revelation as they get it in ours from the Marxist interpretation of history. If we could delve into the deeper strata of Winstanley's consciousness we might discover that he got it as much from observation as from prophecy. He had seen the mighty hurled from their seats. A king's head had fallen in Whitehall before he flung his challenge at property. The revolution he desired was to come through a change wrought by "the spirit Reason" in men's hearts. But that in no way deterred him from devising a shrewd tactic to hasten the process of conversion.

The positive side of Winstanley's creed was an unshaken faith in the "inner light," which he shared with the Anabaptists before him and his contemporaries, the first Quakers. Like them, he held that the spirit of Reason and Love will reveal itself to a mind that waits in patience and silence. To dismiss this conviction of his as a pre-scientific way of saying that the mind has its sub-conscious processes would be a superficial misunderstanding. He meant much more than this. The self-discipline he prescribed consisted of "righteous actions and patient silence." The mind must cease to dwell on outward objects; it must strip itself of covetousness and acquisitiveness, which lead inevitably to oppression; it must practise the golden rule towards its fellow-men and also towards the cattle; it must aim at universal love, which is for him the whole basis of "community" (i.e., communism). In a long definition of prayer he dismisses words as unimportant and stresses only conduct and the rule of "waiting with a meek and quiet spirit." A man who lives thus will discover that he has "a teacher within himself," for he is brought "into community with the globe." To grasp his meaning we have only to remember that it is Reason, or God, that "knits every creature into a oneness." By right conduct and patient waiting we overcome our finitude and become conscious of our part in the Cosmos: then, and then only, it will reveal itself to us and speak to us. This doctrine of the "inner light" is often interpreted as the extremest expression of Protestant Individualism. As Winstanley understands it, it is, on the contrary, an inference from his mystical Pantheism. The ordered whole of the Universe becomes conscious and vocal in a mind that lives according to Reason.

From this doctrine of the Inner Light, Winstanley drew the extremest consequences without flinching. The Scriptures may be useful, but the Inner Light is a superior authority, and it alone can interpret them. He boldly sweeps away all organised religion, churches, Independent meetings, and all the sacraments, including marriage, baptism and funeral rites. "What is the end of all this but to get money?" He will not use what the Puritans called the Means of Grace. "That which you call means doth harden your hearts." He pours his scorn on the Universities, which claim "to own the writings of the Apostles." He despises the hired clergy: "you go on selling words for money to blind

people you have deceived." "Men must leave off teaching one another" and speak only from "the original light within." A strong consciousness of class colours all he writes about the Universities and the clergy. "A ploughman that was never bred in their Universities" may know more of the truth: the first prophets and apostles were shepherds and fishermen.

This contempt for the hired clergy was a common attitude among the Levellers and far outside their ranks: Milton shared it. But Winstanley, in his anti-clericalism, went much deeper. He compares the "imaginary" science of the "Divines"—their "divining doctrine," as he calls it—to witchcraft, and broadens his assault into an attack on all supernatural religion, with its by-products of melancholia and hysteria. What is even more important, he saw that organised religion had become the instrument of the owning class. One outstanding passage from *The Law of Freedom* deserves to be quoted in full:

"There is a threefold discovery of falsehood in this doctrine.

For first it is a doctrine of a sickly and weak spirit who hath lost his understanding in the knowledge of the creation . . . and so runs into fancies either of joy or sorrow.

And if the passion of joy predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal God, personal angels and a local place of glory, which he saith he and all who believe what he saith shall go to after they are dead.

And if sorrow predominate, then he fancies to himself a personal devil and a local place of torment that he shall go to after he is dead, and this he speaks with great confidence.

Or, secondly, this is the doctrine of a subtle running spirit to make an undergrounded wise man mad . . . . For many times when a wise understanding heart is assaulted with this doctrine of a God, a devil, a heaven and a hell, salvation and damnation after a man is dead, his spirit being not strongly grounded in the knowledge of the creation nor in the temper of his own heart, he strives and stretches his brains to find out the depth of that doctrine and cannot attain to it. For, indeed, it is not knowledge but imagination. And so, by poring and puzzling himself in it, loses that wisdom he had, and becomes distracted and mad. And if the passion of joy predominate, then he is merry and sings and laughs, and is ripe in the expression of his words, and will speak strange things, but all by imagination. But if the passion of sorrow predominate, then he is heavy and sad, crying out, He is damned; God had forsaken him and he must go to hell when he die; he cannot make his calling and election sure. And in that distemper many times a man doth hang, kill or drown himself. So that this divining doctrine which you call spiritual and heavenly things, torments people always when they are weak, sickly and under any distemper . . . .

Or, thirdly. This doctrine is made a cloak of policy by the subtle elder brother to cheat his simple younger brother of the freedoms of the earth. For saith the elder Brother, "The Earth is mine, and not yours, Brother; and you must not work upon it, unless you will hire it of me: and you must not take the fruits of it, unless you will buy them of me, by that which I pay you for your labour: for if you should do otherwise, God will not love you, and you shall not go to Heaven when you die, but the Devil will have you and you must be damned in Hell. . . . You must believe what is written and what is told you; and if you will not believe, your damnation will be the greater" . . . .

Well, the younger brother being weak in spirit, and having not a grounded knowledge of the Creation, nor of himself, is terrified, and lets go his hold in the earth, and submits himself to be a slave to his brother for fear of damnation in Hell after death, and in hopes to get Heaven thereby after he is dead; and so his eyes are put out, and his Reason is blinded.

So that this divining spiritual Doctrine is a cheat; for while men are gazing up to Heaven, imagining after a happiness, or fearing a Hell after they are dead, their eyes are put out that they see not what is their birthrights, and what is to be

done by them here on Earth while they are living: This is the filthy dreamer, and the cloud without rain.

And, indeed, the subtle clergy do know, that if they can but charm the people by this their divining Doctrine, to look after riches, heaven and glory when they are dead, that then they shall easily be the inheritors of the earth, and have the deceived people to be their servants."

Thus, two centuries before Marx, Winstanley, in the simplest of plain English, dared to say that "religion is the opium of the people," and not only did he write it, he thrust it under Cromwell's eyes.

In this last book of his, though he was sketching an ideal community, Winstanley has his feet firmly on the earth: His mood of exaltation has passed and the long internal conflict in his mind between the tradition in which he was reared and the rationalism he won by wrestling, ends in the complete victory of his new outlook. He was, after all, the contemporary of the pioneers who were soon to found the Royal Society, but it may have been from More that he derived the enthusiasm for experimental science that glows on so many pages of *The Law of Freedom*. He was impatient with Universities because, as he said, they were busy only with words and traditions. He now proposes to organise research into all the secrets of nature, largely with a practical purpose. The only titles of honour he would bestow are to go to inventors. He suggests that the Postmaster of his Commonwealth shall conduct a weekly gazette, to which correspondents in every district shall contribute not merely news of local happenings, especially where help or relief is needed, but, above all, reports of the discovery of "any secret in Nature, or new invention in any art or trade, or in the tillage of the earth."

The most significant detail in his picture of an ideal community is his sketch of Sunday, for it is entirely his own. It is "very rational and good," he writes, that "one day in seven be still set apart" for fellowship and rest. Under the charge of a "minister" (a layman, of course) elected annually, each parish is to hold its meetings. For these he will have no ritual of any kind. The minister may read aloud the laws of the Commonwealth, which are to be few, simple and brief, and also the reports on "the affairs of the whole land" contained in the Postmaster's gazette. Then are to follow "speeches" or "discourses" on history and the sciences, among which he mentions especially botany and astronomy:

Likewise men may come to see into the nature of the fixed and wandering stars, those great powers of God in the heavens above; and hereby men will come to know the secrets of nature and creation, within which all true knowledge is wrapped up.

Other lectures may deal with the nature of man. He stipulates that others, beside the minister, shall speak, as he may arrange: but "everyone who speaks of any herb, plant, art or nature of mankind is required to speak nothing by imagination, but what he hath found out by his own industry and observation in trial." In plain words, experimental science was Winstanley's substitute for the dogmatism of the chapels and churches. Another touch is significant: he suggests that some of the

lectures should be given in foreign languages: from the days of the Hussites downwards, Communists had always an international outlook. "By this means," he sums up, "in time men shall attain to the practical knowledge of God truly; that they may serve him in spirit and truth, and this knowledge will not deceive a man."

Truly, we are an ungrateful and forgetful nation. Never, though its population counted less than five millions, has England produced in thought and action so many daring pioneers as in these days of the Commonwealth, when men staked their all for an idea, and lived with an intensity their descendants have never touched. Among them, buried though he is in oblivion, Gerrard Winstanley ranks high, as much by his startling courage as by the clarity of his intellectual vision.

H. N. BRAILSFORD.

## MAN, SOCIETY AND TOWNS

THE more I look at towns and their history the more impressed I am by man's power to subjugate to ideas not only things but his own pleasure and comfort. And far too often towns show in their lay-out or structure the dominance of one-track, occasionally two-track, obsessions—special to a time or class, yet not reflecting the true balance of interests even of that time or class, and not coming in sight of meeting the requirements of the citizens at large. This would be depressing were it not also interesting. Certainly it leaves no room for a materialist interpretation of events. It shows up man as what he always has been, and is now, a blinkered idealist, driven by the whip of his insatiate energy into one narrow yard after another when the meadows of the world are open to him.

Of course, the laws of nature and economic necessities do limit the whimsicality of man. He cannot lift himself by his own bootlaces—in spite of all the time he spends dreaming about doing so. But town-history illustrates how persistently he concentrates on the pursuit of single purposes, sometimes even half-understood abstractions, to the neglect or prejudice of plain, decent self-interest.

Social man is far more prone to this lack of ethical perspective than is individual man. It is only a small fraction of individuals who, of self-generated resolve, act in reckless or heroic disregard of their "material" interests—who, for example, starve or mutilate themselves for the sake of some philosophic ideal, or shut themselves up in Carthusian cells when desirable family residences are within their resources. The majority of private men seem to arrive at a creditable balance between indulging their spiritual and sensual caprices—good and bad—and keeping themselves and their dependents fed, clothed and in health. It seems odd that when the private man, of I.Q.100, bunches himself with others as a

nation, an urban community, or a "movement," he loses his sense of proportion and descends to an I.Q. of about 60.

The phenomenon is obvious enough when we think of the Trojan War, the building of the Pyramids, the Kingdom of God in Munster, the Doukhobors, the Ku-Klux-Klan, Italian Fascism, Hitlerite Nazism, or other group-manias with which we do not happen to sympathize. To me it is just as obvious when I think of the growth of London, Glasgow and New York—indeed, of past and present town-development all over the world.

For long stretches of time social and political man takes no interest whatever in the shape and structure of his towns—is blind to a piece of man-made apparatus that affects the character of his daily life more immediately and powerfully than almost any other thing. And when, at rare intervals, he does take an interest in towns, he centres his attention on some isolated factor of their structure to the prejudice of other factors of equal or greater importance. I quote a few cases.

The Greek, Roman and medieval military rulers built or transformed towns with their minds fixed on defence. The resulting pattern is well-known—grid-iron plans with roads running straight to the fortified gates; squares in which troops could be massed for action; state buildings, and in religious times temples, in impressive positions; but dwellings, and trading premises, left to site themselves. The dominant idea, no doubt vital, excluded others important when the towns were built; and there was no foresight. Expansion was neither provided for nor prevented.

Towns built by cultured aristocracies in times and countries free of local wars, as in XVIII Century England and France, showed a different but equally narrow prepossession: visual appearance—architectural grandeur or harmony. The houses of the great were well placed and handsome outside and in. The houses of the respectful classes were pleasing externally when in sight of the mighty; hence the orderly mews and village streets on the great estates. But again the planning of these periods forgot industry and trade, which fitted themselves in as best they could.

Sometimes the military and architectural motives co-existed. Baron Haussmann's Paris of 1850-1870 is an example. The confused and narrow streets of the city were an ideal setting for the much-feared repetition of the mobs, barricades and Bastille-storming of 1789. Therefore, Haussmann drove wide boulevards and avenues through the city, with intersection points from which insurgent masses could be mown down by artillery. This being a large-scale state enterprise, architectural harmony could be added to military efficiency, and thus emerged the monumental Paris that visitors (and citizens) admire. But behind these fine façades is still the old confusion, worsened indeed by added population and congestion. Central Paris is a city of apartment-dwellers. Its attractive café-life is in part a reflection of its deplorable housing standards.

The prepossession that made the typical cities of England was another one: that of industrial productiveness. Again it was valid in itself; the enthusiasm for mechanical progress was the beginning of the immense output of goods and services on which we now count for a high standard of life. But because nothing but this was thought of when our industrial cities were expanding, the most appalling housing conditions resulted. Houses were crammed close together and as near to factories as possible. Open spaces were altogether forgotten. Even the XVIII Century aristocrat's concern for the look of things did not extend to the towns from which, in many cases, he derived new wealth.

Our own age has produced another in this series of single-track approaches to town-building: the housing preoccupation. It is a good one. If we are doomed to proceed for ever on one idea at a time, housing is more important than any other. Also it is broad-based. The swing of the accent from defence or industry to dwelling is a sign that the direct interests of the masses have to be taken notice of. States are taking more and more part in housing for the workers. The form the housing takes is a rough index of the nature of the government of a state. Aristocracies tend to build uniform but still rather human cottages in groups; dictatorships, painfully symmetrical villages and blocks of flats; democracies, one-family houses, as detached and varying as resources permit. But, whatever the type of housing, concentration on housing alone cannot produce good cities. In the U.S. and Great Britain the popular desire is for the one-family house, and the standard desired steadily rises. But, no other aspect of town-planning being thought of, these houses are being wrongly placed; mostly on city fringes. We live further and further from work, and spend more and more of our earnings and leisure time on the daily journey. Getting one thing we want (this time a really important thing) we lose other things we want.

The numerous bad consequences stir different reactions in reforming minds. Here we light on new illustrations of the unsuitability of single-line thinking to a complex subject. Movements spring up which focus on one symptom of the town-development muddle and propose remedies which if applied would bring about another unsatisfactory pattern.

An instance of this is the movement to save England's green and pleasant land from further building. There is a very sound feeling underlying this. All round our cities, and all along our coasts, buildings have been allowed to sprawl in a disorderly way. It is natural, and seems meritorious, that lovers of rural scenery should band themselves together to stop these desecrations. Yet when the idea becomes a single-track obsession it is dangerous. It leads high-minded men to urge that no further building should be allowed in the countryside, and to argue that our congested cities should be rebuilt at their existing high density by means of lofty blocks of flats in order to economise land. What that would mean in terms of the lives of millions of men, women and children

in the cities is forgotten when two or three are gathered together under the banner of an æsthetic ideal—in itself a fine one and important to the immured millions.

I could quote many instances of such lack of balance in the sectional movements that have grown up as a result of bad town and country development. Every such movement has genuine validity. But almost any one of them, if it secured exclusive possession of the public ear, and dominated governmental planning policy in the future, would lead to an unsatisfactory town and country planning pattern. One-track planning has proved itself bad planning in the past. There is demonstrable need of social or governmental action if we are to have good towns and a generally unspoiled countryside. The possibility of such action depends on the building up of a consensus of public opinion, which unlike all the public opinions of the past, is based on a proper balancing of many factors. There are some signs that this is beginning to happen. But a much wider spread of interest is necessary, and soon, if the forces now mobilised to produce a socially injurious town and country pattern are to be controlled in time.

Paradoxically enough, the most dangerous force at the moment is state housing policy, pushed on by the passionate pressure of the bombed-out and newly-married for any kind of decent house, anywhere within travelling distance of work, and quickly. This demand must be met. Unless there is a new awareness of town structure it will be met, as it was between 1919 and 1939, in the main by suburban extensions to towns which are too big already, and to a less extent by multi-storey flat-building in centres which are heavily congested. Both these methods are bad. But at present the effective national policy is for each local authority to build at the utmost speed and on the scale of its pre-war programmes. The broad result must be, if this continues, that most building will take place in the urban areas where most building was going on between the wars. It means that the bigger city-agglomerations will get still bigger, and the small country towns, long at a standstill or declining, will continue so. This is the exact opposite of what is in the national interests; and the exact opposite of what will give people what they most want—good family homes and neighbourly communities in pleasant surroundings.

Public fixation on housing alone will more and more present city dwellers with the lamentable choice of the worker in central London—a good house and garden miles out in the suburbs, with wearisome and costly daily journeys; or a tenement-flat or part of an old house nearer to his work. The pressure on the inner areas will be maintained, and provision of open space there will remain next to impossible. Community life will be further weakened by the divorce between homes and workplaces and the sheer size of the continuous built-up areas. Traffic congestion will increase. And the green country, already difficult to reach

from the inner areas, will be pushed further away by the outward advance of the suburbs.

Now the right course for the correction of these disastrous trends is in principle easily grasped. But it does require the proper balancing of a number of factors. Of these the most important for the ordinary citizen are:

Good homes in pleasant open surroundings (basic to his family life).

Efficient working conditions for industry and business (on which he depends for a rising standard of living).

Adequate local services and community buildings (making possible what he may desire in social and cultural life).

Convenient arrangement of all these (so that he may really be able to benefit by them without long journeys).

This is a mere outline, but it is the sort of outline to start with if we are to have any hope of generating the dynamic that will give us better towns. I believe that a handful of sincere and well-informed writers, speakers, and political leaders could quickly get large sections of the public to broaden their view from a one-track to at least a four-track view. Similarly, the specialised interests must come to terms with each other and with the public.

Actually the planning policy accepted in principle by the Government during the last few years would meet all the main popular and sectional enthusiasms. But the public, though much interested, is still unable to visualise the policy in the clear, almost pictorial way necessary for common action. No Minister and no Party, so far, has given any lead towards positive enthusiasm and drive for anything but a one-track housing policy exactly on the inter-war lines but speeded up a bit. And yet, I repeat, the Coalition Government, with all solemnity and deliberation, did accept in principle a far more enlightened policy: that recommended by the Barlow Royal Commission in 1940.

I need not summarise the Barlow recommendations. Let me convert the policy they imply into the sort of picture that could arouse a political dynamic.

We are entering a period of rebuilding rather than expansion. Of the  $13\frac{1}{2}$  million dwellings in Great Britain, 9 millions date from before 1914. We built  $4\frac{1}{2}$  million houses in 20 years between the wars, and we are still perhaps 1 to  $1\frac{1}{2}$  millions short. Under a full employment régime it is no extravagant programme to catch up the  $1\frac{1}{2}$  millions shortage in, say, five years and then replace, say,  $6\frac{1}{2}$  millions of our worst dwellings in a further 20 years. The working force of  $1\frac{1}{4}$  million builders which it has already been agreed we should have by the fourth year of peace could easily build or rebuild 8 million houses in 20 to 25 years. This we ought to aim at. It is not a disproportionate use of man-power and materials to provide our people with good homes in good communities, for these are the bases of all happiness and culture.

The greater part of this task is the rebuilding of our existing cities. Most of them have desperately congested areas, and on rebuilding must be opened out, and their populations reduced, in order that the majority who will still live in them may have acceptable housing conditions—including a predominance of single-family houses. It is probable that to reach a decent standard of housing and open space four or five million people should move out of congested areas in this 20 to 25 years. These should be re-accommodated in new towns and by carefully-planned extensions of existing country towns—not in further suburbs. Thus the unbuilt-on areas around the big cities could be saved from further encroachment, to the immense benefit of the dwellers in these cities. The new towns and older country towns ought similarly to be kept within planned limits; in general, the aim should be to build them up to a population of a certain size (say 30,000 to 50,000, which would provide for all ordinary industrial needs and for a good community life and culture) and then stop. In this way we should work towards a pattern of reasonably-sized and well-distributed towns—towns in which the majority of people would both live and work—on a background of permanently-safeguarded agricultural country.

No very great additional area of rural land would be required for this programme—not more than about 350,000 acres of the 33,000,000 acres of lowland farms and woods, and none at all of our 18,000,000 acres of moorland and heaths. But by enabling the overcrowded people to have ample space for living in planned towns, the casual sprawl which spoils far more land than it uses could be prevented.

Three new instruments of policy are, however, necessary. The location of industry must be guided, so that further settlement in congested or overgrown towns is restricted—in fact, only permitted when it can be proved to be absolutely necessary—and settlement in new towns and country towns encouraged. This does not mean dictation either to industrial firms or industrial workers. In fact, the new pattern is so much in the interests of both that the provision of the right opportunities would result in much free movement in the desirable directions.

Second, there must be firm public control of land-use; in particular, there must be maximum density standards in rebuilding as there already are in new development—and effective power to stop the suburban sprawl of buildings over farm land. This is why a national compensation-betterment system is indispensable, as the Uthwatt Report showed, and the Government White Paper on Land Use agreed.

Third, we need positive agencies for promoting new-town building and country-town extension where (as is often the case) such large schemes are beyond the strength of existing local authorities or private enterprise. The agencies need not all be public; though the sites must usually be acquired compulsorily, owing to their size, private enterprise, or limited-dividend associations, could take as much part as desired in such developments.

There would be immense scope for structural and architectural variety in the new towns, for sympathetic adaptation of the new to the old in country-town extensions, for re-creating local community life in the reconstructed parts of the great cities. I can imagine no sort of enterprise in which a larger number of people could take a personal interest and an effective part than town-building and town-rebuilding. Yet among the public-spirited, the enlightened, and the idealists, who lead the public, the subject is still a cinderella subject. It is thought of as something for the future, something that can wait; whereas, in fact, no subject is more urgent, for by neglecting it we are really deciding that towns shall be rebuilt badly and to the injury of family and social life for many generations to come. When our other political successes and failures are forgotten, men will bless or curse our times by reference to the town and country pattern we leave them.

Because at the moment we face a danger of going wrong more rapidly than ever, we have also a chance of a really great rebuilding policy. Can we take it? As a student of the technics of the subject, I say: Yes, easily.. As a student of the hierarchy of social thought and politics, I am more doubtful; at all levels there is too much one-track idealism. Still, I say: Yes, but we must hurry up.

F. J. OSBORN.

## BOOK REVIEWS

ARCHITECTURE ARISING. By Howard Robertson. Faber & Faber, 10/6.

In this age of transition all the major problems are horribly complicated; nobody can hope to escape confusions of thought without some contact with an expert living within the field of the problem. The great value of Mr. Howard Robertson's book is that it briefly gives enough knowledge to enable many kinds of ordinary people to think freely about the architecture to come. He leaves one with the only possible right feelings about the rival claims of the old and the new; he cares for modern experiment and he cares for tradition, and never for tradition for tradition's sake, or novelty for the sake of its newness.

No art is as much everyone's concern as architecture; the fact that people bother themselves so little to know anything about it has resulted in the towns which surround us. The development of new materials and processes set free infinite irresponsibility in the creation of the tawdry and ugly. (Cement casting allows motifs reminiscent of tablecloth embroidery and travesties of Corinthian capitals to mix with yellow brick on the fronts of villas at Shepherd's Bush; it is hard to forget a rippling roof formed of iridescent tiles at Barcelona; there are rumours of plastic houses with every corner rounded off.) At the same time, modern materials and processes make all that one wishes for possible. There is no longer the necessity for rich men to be the sole occupants of stone

castles and poor men to be content with damp hovels; but all may be housed in comfortable buildings as pleasing as any the eye has ever seen. If we appear to have decadent taste when compared with our ancestors, we might as well do ourselves the justice of remembering that we have a harder task than they. To use the few local materials in the best way gives a far simpler problem than that which the modern architect has to solve: the right use of countless new materials in any place, in any way. The recognition of how much is involved in the making of right choices for the rebuilding ahead depresses some of us who look on, and inclines us to leave the whole thing to the competent people on the job. Anyone who feels in this case would do well to read Mr. Howard Robertson's book.

It is written for many people, for so many that one is sorry that it should cost as much as 10/6; one might (though unwillingly) sacrifice its nice production to a cheaper format in order to reach a larger public. Each chapter gives some definite inside knowledge of its subject in a way which can be taken hold of and used. The very first paragraph, for example, makes one search one's conscience wondering if one has not been too content to judge buildings on a two-dimensional view. The points Mr. Howard Robertson makes could be brooded upon with equal profit by people as dissimilar as a municipal authority hoping for a Gothic-style town hall, a moneymaking lady wishing to build a Tudoresque cottage, a surrealist, or an artisan. The second chapter brings one face to face with the complexity of modern building practices, and it becomes at once more possible to think realistically of building problems.

The chapter headed Means of Communication makes an excellent plea for what is more than utility. Mr. Howard Robertson discusses why materials have such importance in buildings: the beauty of the grain in the wood is only quality, is "superfluous," as is the masterpiece carved in wood, "yet there is such an attraction, such a fascination which takes place between minds and spirits through the medium of these superfluities that it is safe to say that the production of them should never cease. If quality is a universal currency, communication through the arts is a universal language which building materials can help to make intelligible."

Mr. Howard Robertson advocates regional control of planning and designing, stressing the fact that good building in England has always been local in character. If one has fears of post-war needs being met by mass production ordered from on high, one is heartened by a voice which favours decentralization of control, the central authority being responsible for research and the promulgation of standards, leaving to the local authorities their power to plan. This policy has been challenged and it is imperilled by some tendencies of the time, but we hope and believe that it is going to remain the established practice in all cases in which the local authority proves competent enough.

Perhaps the pleasure and stimulus to be got out of the book come from its human element. It deals with what can be enjoyed in living rather than with abstract architectural theory. Whatever our relation to the new architecture is, we may work in it, shop in it, look at it, be the client commissioning it, or the tenant renting it; however it is, it will be (and in many ways) our concern.

URSULA EDGCUMBE.

CIVIC DESIGN AND THE HOME. By Arnold Whittick. Faber & Faber. 1/6.

DESIGN OF DWELLINGS. Ministry of Health. H.M.S.O., 1/-.

HOUSING MANUAL. Ministry of Health and Ministry of Works. H.M.S.O., 2/-.

Some of the new ideas about housing are forcibly expressed in Mr. Whittick's pamphlet, his first emphasis (which we applaud) being on the importance of basing housing designs on the wishes and needs of the families who are to occupy them. He gives useful statistics which indicate the popular choice of the detached house in preference to the flat or the terrace. He is vehement in his protest against planning for an ordered architectural appearance at the expense of amenities for the people housed. Very good; but one would not like it forgotten that these people, as well as having feelings concerning their own house, will also have eyes for the whole design of their district; and it is a pity to throw away established values for new values, if it is possible to have both. Mr. Whittick finds them incompatible; for example, he recommends that we forgo all terraces and squares for one new valuable idea: "It should be taken as an axiom in all future planning of residential areas that the sun should determine the orientation of houses, not the street." Even though we acknowledge the value of sunlight and the need for more air and sun in our houses, we remember that the sun moves round and that there are people who choose a house with east and west aspects in preference to south. It might be excellent to build some areas without reference to streets; Mr. Whittick gives the suggestion that such areas should be between traffic arteries. "All that would be necessary would be to arrange for service ways from these traffic arteries and the service ways would be threaded among the houses and gardens on a basis of convenience, very much as the footways are threaded among groups of buildings in medieval towns." But there is need of much imagination to relate such a scheme to the landscape, as is pointed out in Design of Dwellings.

This report (Design of Dwellings by a sub-committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee and a Study Group of the Ministry of Town and Country Planning) gives a sympathetic hearing to the best of the new ideas (such as Mr. Whittick's) and is a first-rate piece of work. It really has dug out the causes of dissatisfaction with housing of the inter-war years. It says: "We believe that the recommendations of the Study Group reproduced with the report will, if adopted, go far to avoid a repetition of former errors." This claim seems valid. We would like to put a copy of Design of Dwellings into the hands of all people who have any care for architecture or for the effects of surroundings upon the human being. Merely to know that such humane and æsthetic considerations have the attention of Government departments is cheering; and the more widely it is known that local authorities have access to such good advice the less the public will meekly acquiesce in accepting second-rate houses and planning.

The Housing Manual embodies the accepted recommendations of the departmental reports: it appeals to local authorities to set a good standard not only of accommodation and construction, but also in questions of arrangement, taste, and harmony with the surroundings—which make the employment of a qualified architect essential. It is the ruling idea that every house built and each estate planned shall have a defined place in a complete neighbourhood scheme; and that existing towns shall be zoned in social units based on Professor Fawcett's residential unit, which takes the capacity of the local school as the determinant of the size of a neighbourhood. Each neighbourhood, in addition to its school, should have its social centre and other public buildings, its shopping quarter, and its open spaces—so disposed

as to provide a continuous walk. The neighbourhood should be complete also in the sense of housing a mixed community of different classes and occupations, and providing accommodation for old people and single people as well as for families, flats and terraces as well as detached houses. This idea of neighbourhood planning on a long-term programme is the most universal, established, and important of the ideas which prevail and will make their mark on post-war housing. Wedded to it is the idea of a more open lay-out, with attention to the orientation of the individual house, and to the interpenetration of house and garden, and of town and country. Comprehensively, it is the triumph of the garden city idea, the great reward of brave-spirited pioneers.

The Manual includes photographs of recent buildings, which make their own suggestions.

U.E.

COUNTRY PLANNING. A Study of Rural Problems. By The Agricultural Economics Research Institute, Oxford. Oxford University Press, 7/6.

This is the report of a survey team which, under the direction of Dr. C. S. Orwin, has studied a sample rural area in order to test the method and the scope of an inquiry which would throw light upon every phase and condition of rural life and labour and provide a basis for country planning. The survey team set out to find the answers to three main questions: (1) How to increase the productivity and the attractiveness of rural industries, chiefly farming; (2) how to raise living conditions to approximately urban standards; (3) how to overcome the disabilities of small isolated village communities in relation to the social and cultural facilities which the nation affords.

The foundation of rural reconstruction must be a prosperous agriculture. However, those who speak and write of the restoration of agriculture are thinking in the wrong terms and neglecting attractive possibilities for a manifest impossibility; because it is manifestly absurd to think of restoring the conditions of the traditional high-farming of the best agricultural period, when labour was plentiful and cheap (at 10/- to 12/- a week) and all agricultural produce fetched good prices in the open market. Our farms are still adapted to this traditional self-sufficient mixed farming, which for a long time farmers have been quite unable to practise and will never be able to practise again. What is first of all necessary, therefore (long overdue and now urgent), is a pretty drastic re-mapping and re-modelling of farm layouts adapting them to modern conditions of working and modern techniques. The two chapters which apply this principle to the farms in the survey area are the most valuable in the book. On these lines, with farms, says, of a minimum of 500 acres and fully mechanized, a competent and active man can make a good living from the land and can offer high wages and interesting work to his staff. It means making the most of the land with the least labour—productivity and prosperity; and it means making agriculture quickly adaptable to changing demand. Without this new economic foundation, already proved again and again by successful pioneers, there can only be slavery, heartbreak, and declining production, which no dreams of the restoration of agriculture and no romantic ideology of the countryside will avail to avert. The one other rural trade which is sure of a future, if it is adapted to the needs of mechanized farming, is that of the blacksmith.

The payment of good agricultural wages will not enable the country to hold its own against the towns unless the usual public services can be brought to the villages. The local rural administration cannot in most cases provide these services, even with the aid of grants. The cost is stubbornly related to the density of population served; at the same time, the countryman ought not to be worse off than the citizen of a town. The conclusion seems inescapable that water, electricity, and sewerage can only be provided universally on a national scale by averaging cost and levying a flat rate. The Report contends for the principle of national responsibility for financing a national service, as in the case of the main roads, and for applying this principle to these services, with local responsibility for administration. Rural housing does not, for the most part, require the development of new estates; the problem is, by reconditioning, rebuilding, and filling in, to improve and increase the accommodation in the villages as they stand. It is estimated that accommodation can be increased in this way up to fifty per cent.; and this margin of expansion

should suffice in all cases where the villages have not been repopulated by new industries. Obviously, housing of this kind can only be carried out well under the direction of an architect of special skill and experience, and such professional service will have to be made available to the local rural authorities. The Report finds that there is very little public interest in local administration; the elected bodies are unrepresentative and, for the most part, perfunctory. But it is made clear that genuine interest tends to be frustrated by the handicap of local finance, and it is suggested that local knowledge and voluntary public service could be much more effectively mobilised in association with national finance.

A spotlight is thrown on the almost devastating effects on the smaller villages of the educational reforms initiated by the Hadow Committee. The withdrawal of the older children from the school and the disappearance of the schoolmaster from the village have meant the disintegration of village life. Here in the small isolated village is the heart of the rural problem, once the future of agriculture is provided for on the lines indicated earlier. Village populations have declined by twenty-five per cent. and more during the last two generations. At the same time, a village of a few hundred people cannot live a civilized life. Something more than a thousand seems to be the minimum number for a social unit able to justify the provision of public services and to maintain a community life. The Report is in favour of repopulating the villages by the decentralizing of industry, housing the workers in the villages within a certain radius of new factory sites, provided that the new population is housed in the villages on the principles of expansion already mentioned, and not segregated in new housing estates. Thus would be created new mixed communities of many interests and of all classes. It is to such a marriage of town and country that the health and happiness of both belong in the future. It cannot be achieved without careful planning, and cannot be planned without a full understanding of the conditions and the rejection of the fatal misconceptions which prevail. The constructive suggestions in the Report are not new, many of them are already widely accepted principles, but they are here put together comprehensively and in closest touch with first-hand and expert observation of the actual problems, in a book that is attractively written and produced, and inexpensive.

H.J.B.

RURAL HOUSING. Ministry of Health. H.M.S.O., 1/-.

COMMUNITY CENTRES. Ministry of Education. H.M.S.O., 9d.

There was progress between the wars in rural housing, chequered and laggard, but definite and encouraging. For it became clear that it was going to respond to the stimulus of the increased subsidy for agricultural housing provided in the Housing (Financial Provisions) Act of 1938, which was based on the recommendations of the Rural Housing Sub-committee in their second report. In this Third Report, the Committee express themselves as satisfied that, with the stimulus, encouragement, and guidance of the Ministry of Health, with adequate financial assistance, and with county co-operation, the Rural District Councils can do the job. The best Councils have an excellent record, and much can be done to bring the others up to their standard. The Committee emphatically rejects the proposal to centralize housing responsibility by transferring the powers of the Rural District Councils to a national body, to regional bodies, or to the County Councils. Their main proposal for improving the present machinery is that the Ministry of Health shall invite the County Councils and the Rural District Councils to set up a voluntary joint committee for each country. This body would stimulate and help the backward authorities, would maintain close touch with the Ministry, and would create a common county standard which would not fall below a national standard.

The immediate post-war step should be a thorough and comprehensive survey of housing needs in every rural district, followed by the preparation of a long-term programme of repair, reconditioning, and building. Thus housing would be put under continuous review, and progressive improvement organized.

This reasonably optimistic view assumes that there will be national policies

which will reduce inflated building costs and interest rates, and allocate a due proportion of labour and materials to rural needs. The Committee accept and insist on the principle of parity of living conditions between town and country. The problem of providing the villages with the public services is in the background of their considerations, but it is a question whether this can be solved on a county basis with Exchequer aid, as they suggest.

They make a point of the value of publicity as a means of stimulating the housing conscience, and recommend that the Ministry of Health initiate a campaign for this purpose.

If the national life were rooted in true and vigorous local communities, most of our problems would be half-solved; few would be insoluble. The beginnings of community are very practical matters of equipment and organization, the plant and the institutions. Voluntary associations in this field over a period of more than fifty years have gathered a comprehensive experience which is admirably digested and presented in this departmental handbook. Here, briefly and on the most general lines, is practical advice on how to make the approach and provide the machinery which will give stimulus and facilities to corporate life wherever there is a social unit. The report is primarily for the assistance of local education authorities, but the demand which it sets out to meet is a citizens' demand, and it is for citizens to see for themselves what is possible, and to take the lead in requiring and in running community centres. The possibilities go far beyond the obvious. This is not the mere matter of a local hall, nor is it just an official fad; it is not extravagant if those who have looked on the best and the worst in human life recognize in it the most elevated matter: the redemption of Branch Street, the trial of the masses, civilization.

H.J.B.

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## FIT FOR HEROES ?

The difference between this time and last time is still a sensational possibility. But the hour has struck and there is still no sign of the statesmanship without which there will be no difference at all worth speaking of, for, without control of the use of the land and a national authority which will exert it, town and country planning is a mere hobby. So much is ready and waiting, so many are expectant, and it is the whole life of the people in every aspect that hangs on the national decisions which have been missed. It is crisis already. Will the election retrieve this failure?

## TO THE READER

This journal, which is published quarterly by The Ethical Union in a new format in place of "The Ethical Societies' Chronicle," will be expanded when paper is made available. Meanwhile, although short of space, we want our readers to have the opportunity of expressing their views and we invite correspondence.

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